

CRANDVIEW SCHOOL
Putnam Street
Bolivar
Jefferson County
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-291

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GRANDVIEW SCHOOL

HABS No. WV-291

Location: Putnam Street, Bolivar, Jefferson County, West Virginia.

Significance: Although Grandview School functioned as an elementary school for a only relatively brief period, it played a significant role in the education of African-American children in Harpers Ferry in the final decades before segregation in public schools was declared unconstitutional in 1954. As a teaching laboratory for students from Storer College who were pursuing degrees in Elementary Education, Grandview School was, in effect, an extension of the Storer College campus. Several of Grandview's teachers and both its principals were also important members of the Storer College community, thus further linking the two schools.

Description: In terms of its architecture, Grandview School seems at first glance to be an unassuming and unremarkable structure. As originally constructed, the school was a small, one-story brick building located near a ridge along the northern edge of Bolivar overlooking the Potomac River. Inside, four classrooms with hardwood floors and blackboards on the interior walls opened onto a central corridor. Grandview's plan repeats the most basic configuration used in graded schools which had been developed nearly a century earlier. The four-room plan with a central corridor had been used most notably in the first fully graded public school in the United States, Quincy Grammar School, which was built in Boston in 1848. Even this early example was more elaborate than Grandview School as the basic four-room plan was repeated on three floors in the Quincy Grammar School.

In spite of this seeming anachronism, Grandview School was also the product of a new trend in American school architecture of the 1930s. Rejecting the traditional use of various historical styles to create ostensibly individualized school facades, architects increasingly favored a more modern style. Grandview was a somewhat miniaturized example of this trend favoring a more streamlined, brick-box design for school buildings.

History: The first organized education available to African-American children in the Harpers Ferry area was offered under the auspices of the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Society. A makeshift mission school was first established in Lockwood House during the winter of 1864-65. Developed from its modest beginnings under the directorship of Nathan C. Brackett, Storer College was granted a charter by the State of West Virginia in March 1868. The first elementary school built specifically for African-American students was not completed until April 1888, following a successful petition drive organized the previous year by local residents. Boasting an initial enrollment of forty-two students, the school was housed in a two-room, wood frame building on Ridge Street in Bolivar on a lot which measured 60' X 132'.

By the late 1920s, the elementary school in Bolivar could no longer accommodate its growing student population and had fallen into disrepair. Beginning in 1926, the basement of the Zion Baptist Church, also on Ridge Street, was rented to the Harpers Ferry District Board to provide additional classroom space. On April 27, 1929, the *Farmers Advocate* announced a bond issue to cover the construction costs of three schools in the Harpers Ferry school district. The proposal included an estimated \$15,000 to erect a new four-room school and auditorium for African-American children. An open meeting was held at the high school on May 8, 1929 to discuss the bond issue. Estimates

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for the proposed buildings were presented by W. R. Frampton of the architectural firm Frampton & Bowers based in Huntington, West Virginia. During the ensuing discussion, Prof. G. W. Ludwig, principal of the high school in Harpers Ferry, noted that the grade school in Bolivar was overcrowded and badly in need of repairs. Citizens who attended the meeting voted to place the bond issue of \$112,500 on a special ballot. If approved, these funds would be used to erect a new high school at Harpers Ferry, a graded school at Millville, and a new graded school for African-American students at Harpers Ferry.

On June 13, 1929, Harpers Ferry district citizens voted on and, by all accounts, overwhelmingly passed the bond issue. Contrary to the original estimate of \$15,000 published in April in the *Farmers Advocate*, the final bond issue allocated only \$10,000 for the elementary school later known as Grandview, while the estimated cost of the high school for white students in Harpers Ferry had been raised from \$60,000 to \$82,500. The *Farmers Advocate* announced on July 13, 1929 that the architectural firm Frampton & Bowers had been employed by the Board of Education to draft specifications for all three buildings. The elementary school for African-American children was to be built at a new site on Putnam Street directly behind its predecessor.

Although the school opened in the fall of 1930, it seems not to have been called Grandview School until as late as the mid-1940s. The building itself was not identified by name. In contrast to Harpers Ferry High School whose name was clearly emblazoned on the front facade, Grandview School was identified only by an inscription above the entrance specifying 1930 as the date of its construction. The first reference to "Grand View School" which has been located was an announcement in the *Spirit of Jefferson* for an immunization clinic to be held at the school on October 2, 1946.

Storer College was instrumental in the history of Grandview School, as it had been in the development of the earlier two-room elementary school in Bolivar. Over the years, many Storer College graduates joined the permanent teaching staff at Grandview, including Grandview Principal Clarence T. Napper who was President of the Storer College Alumni Association from as early as 1922, and later graduates Robert L. Nunn (June 1950) and Ruby C. Brown (June 1952). Other staff members also had significant ties to the college; Robert E. McDaniel, Principal of Grandview prior to Clarence T. Napper's appointment, was a Trustee of Storer College at least in the 1920s and 1930s, while Grandview teacher Mary W. Page belonged to the Women's Commission of Storer in the 1940s.

In his report for the academic year 1942-43, President Henry T. McDonald noted that several members of the Grandview School staff would henceforth be listed in the Storer College catalog as teachers in the division of Elementary Education. The so-called "critic teachers" at Grandview whom McDonald mentioned included Clarence T. Napper (Principal), Bernard M. Dennis, Gladys L. Kent (later Gladys K. Spraggin), and Mary W. Page. The tradition of cooperation between Storer College and Grandview School was thus officially institutionalized, in part in response to changing national standards for colleges granting degrees in Education. A promotional booklet featuring views of Storer College which seems to have been published in the 1940s included a photograph of Grandview School with a caption identifying it as the site used by Storer College students for laboratory teaching. As this brochure indicates, Grandview was literally incorporated into Storer College; it was considered to be an integral part of both Storer's campus and educational programs.

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The West Virginian firm Frampton & Bowers designed Grandview School, along with the two other buildings included in the 1929 bond issue, the elementary school in Millville and the high school in Harpers Ferry. Work on the foundations of Grandview School commenced in April 1930. By mid-July its brick walls were in the midst of construction, although by that time brick-laying for the new high school was almost finished. At the end of August, the *Farmers Advocate* reported that the four-room brick school in Bolivar was nearing completion, at a total cost of \$11,000.

Harpers Ferry High School was the real focus of the bond issue and subsequent design program. Although Frampton & Bowers used similar materials in both the high school and Grandview School, the design of the latter is extremely simplified in comparison. Frampton & Bowers had established a reputation for several area school buildings they had designed. An article in the *Spirit of Jefferson* on August 1, 1929 praised the firm for their design of "the splendid new, up-to-date high school at Martinsburg." In fact, their design of the high school in Harpers Ferry echoed features of the Martinsburg High School, including the use of brick with contrasting light colored trim and the symmetrical ordering of the front facade with pilasters. In comparison, the exterior of Grandview appears incredibly bare, without even these few ornamental details. In addition to fifteen classrooms, Harpers Ferry High School featured two specialized spaces, a gymnasium and an auditorium, rooms which were becoming increasingly *de rigueur* for new school buildings. Although an auditorium was included in the original proposal for Grandview School, it was never constructed. Even this minor embellishment was eliminated in an attempt to reduce the cost of building the school for African-American children in order to construct a modern high school originally accessible only to white children in Harpers Ferry.

Although the completed high school featured bathrooms on each floor, Grandview's bare-bones design did not provide for such modern conveniences. However, at some point in the 1940s or early 1950s, a small, cement block addition was built on the back of the school. The addition comprised two bathrooms (one for girls and one for boys), a janitor's closet, and an additional classroom. Since the earliest notice of the appointment of Isaiah Reeler to the position of janitor at Grandview School appeared in 1952, this addition must have been completed by this time. However, as consistent records of appointments to Grandview School have not been located, it is difficult to determine if a janitor had been on duty at the school prior to this date, and whether a correlation can be made between this position and the construction of the addition. In any case, the addition to Grandview School suggests not only concerns with modern hygiene, but also the issue of equality which was central to contemporary debates surrounding school segregation. The addition of modern amenities to Grandview, while clearly an afterthought, stands as an attempt to maintain separate but equal facilities for black and white students.

Grandview School was forced to close as an elementary school for African-American children after the Supreme Court's decision on *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 ruling against school segregation. However, it did continue to be used for a short time as an integrated school for fifth- and sixth-grade students. On the one hand, Grandview School stands as a testament to the flourishing African-American educational community in Harpers Ferry centered around Storer College. At the same time, the modest architecture of Grandview School suggests its position in relation to the struggle for racial and social equality both in Harpers Ferry and within a broader national context.

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